



## ANALYSES

# The beginning of the Ukrainian offensive: Obstacles and perspectives



\* Volodymyr Solovian

\* Mykhailo Samus

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**Among other things, Kyiv received self-propelled howitzers like CAESAR, PzH2000 and KRAB from the international community. [Reuters]**

Since the beginning of June, the Ukrainian army has carried out a number of tactical offensives in the south of Ukraine aiming to achieve a breakthrough in the Russian defensive lines. In response, Russia intensified missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's military infrastructure.

In this paper, the authors assess the operational situation in which Ukraine and Russia have approached the decisive phase of the current year's campaign, and the prospects and challenges of the Ukrainian offensive.

## **The operational situation on the fronts of the Russian-Ukrainian war**

### **Russia**

During the winter-spring campaign of 2023, the Russian command focused on establishing advantageous front configuration in Donbas on the eve of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Based on the history of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the most effective defence strategy is one that utilises water barriers such as rivers and channels. Therefore, the Russian command planned to turn the Siverskyi Donetsk-Donbas canal into the frontier of its defence system in the Donetsk region. This obstacle determined the concentration of Russia's main efforts in Bakhmut, as gaining control over the city provides access to the eastern bank of the canal.

As a result of the nine-month assault, the Russians managed to capture the ruins, which were a cozy and economically developed town with a population of 70,000 just a year ago. This "victory" of the Russian army and the Wagner PMC could be called pyrrhic. However, despite the public statements of the Russian side, it is too early to summarise the results of the Battle of Bakhmut.

Throughout May, the counteroffensive actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) on the flanks of Russian troops grouping around Bakhmut allowed Ukraine to regain control over the dominant heights to the west of the city. As of today, the Russians are unable to launch an offensive west of the city, while their units are trapped in the range of Ukrainian artillery fire. In addition, the storming operations in Bakhmut exhausted the most motivated assault units of the Wagner PMC mercenaries and the Russian Airborne Forces. Consequently, Russia's ability to conduct large-scale offensive operations in the upcoming months has been significantly diminished. The statistics of combat clashes is an eloquent confirmation of this. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, there were an average of 94 combat clashes per day in March, 56 in April, and 41 in May. [\(1\)](#) Hence, the intensity of Russian attacks has declined, indicating a shift of the occupying forces towards a defensive stance.

On the southern front (the Zaporizhia and Kherson regions along the Dnieper river), the configuration of the contact line has not changed since April 2022. In anticipation of Ukraine's offensive, the Russian army reorganised the operational disposition of its troops, forming two echelons of defence. To maintain the front in the Zaporizhia region, Russia has concentrated a contingent of about 120,000, which can be replenished by reserves from other directions. At the same time, over the past year, the Russian army has equipped an echeloned strip of fortifications and minefields.

Russia is continuously trying to exhaust the rear of the AFU by launching missile-bomb and drone strikes deep into Ukrainian territory. The Russian army launched 205 missiles of various types during May 2023, which is the second largest figure since the beginning of the large-scale war. (In December 2022, Ukraine was attacked with 236 missiles.) [\(2\)](#) The main target of the Russians is the military infrastructure: air defence systems, ammunition warehouses and logistics centres. However, low reconnaissance capabilities and the inaccuracy of certain types of missiles often damage civilian infrastructure, particularly residential buildings. In this way, the Kremlin seeks to exert pressure on the morale of Ukrainian society, with the aim of undermining its resilience and determination to sustain the resistance.

As for the tactical rear of the Ukrainian army, which extends up to 20 km, the use of KAB-500 guided aerial bombs by Russian air forces has caused significant damage to front-line military and civilian infrastructure. This circumstance has become an obvious challenge for Ukraine. As of now, the AFU do not have effective means to shoot down air targets of this type.

The effectiveness of Russian missile and drone strikes remains insignificant against the backdrop of painful reputational costs for the Kremlin, as pseudo-hypersonic Kinzhals and ballistic Iskanders were

hit by the US Patriot anti-aircraft missile system. Simultaneously, the escalation of Russian missile and drone strikes is undeniable proof of Russia's sustained manufacturing capabilities and indicates the limited effectiveness of the sanctions regime.

## Ukraine

In this context, the substantial increase in military-technical cooperation between Moscow and Tehran should be noted. The direct result of Russia-Iran cooperation is the active use of Iranian-made UAVs, namely Shahed-131, Shahed-136 and Mohajer-6. [\(3\)](#) In addition, according to the media, Iran supplies Russia with Ghaem-5 aerial bombs, Dehlaviyeh ATGMs, 125-mm tank shells, helmets and body armour. There is still a possibility that Russia may receive Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar ballistic missiles from Iran, as well as finalise new contracts for the supply of a wide range of artillery ammunition. In exchange, Moscow provides Teheran with fighter aircraft. Thus, Iran has already announced the procurement of Su-35 fighters (probably the batch that Egypt refused to purchase) and is considering the possibility of attack helicopters, radars and Yak-130 aircraft purchase. [\(4\)](#)

The Ukrainian military has not carried out large-scale offensive operations since the fall of last year, when tens of thousands of square kilometres in Kharkiv, Kherson and Donetsk regions were liberated. Since that time, the AFU have been primarily focused on strategic defence, aiming to buy time for the mobilisation of reserves and the integration of Western military aid.

The main priority of the AFU during the spring of 2023 was maintaining the defence of Bakhmut. Military observers called the battle for the town the "Verdun" [\(5\)](#) of the Russian-Ukrainian war due to significant losses on both sides. From the Ukrainian perspective, the Bakhmut garrison performed a number of important tasks on the tactical (such as maintaining the front in most of the attacked directions, as Russia was forced to concentrate efforts on the town alone) and strategic (such as exhausting the enemy's resources) levels.

May 2023 was a turning point. Ukrainian initiated shaping operations with the aim of preparing the future battlefield for offensive actions. The increase in the intensity of drone and missile strikes on Russian logistics in the tactical and operational rear is clear evidence of the initial phase of Ukraine's offensive.

## The armed forces of each side on the eve of fierce summer battles

### Russia

As of the beginning of the summer campaign, the Russian Armed Forces (RAF) have approximately 404,000 servicemen directly operating within Ukraine's territory, including reserves at all levels. The Russian occupation contingent possesses approximately 1,800 tanks (although not all of them are

operational or adequately crewed), 4,300 units of the main types of armoured vehicles, approximately 3,000 artillery systems and up to 870 multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). Considering that the occupation contingent corresponds to approximately 445 battalion tactical groups (BTG), [\(6\)](#) it can be concluded that the complement of Russian troops's equipment is only 30-40% of the standard capacity.

In the bordering regions of Kursk, Bryansk and Belgorod, there are approximately 25 contingent formations of the BTG type, with a total number of about 20,000 servicemen. The length of the border covered by these units is more than 700 kilometres, despite the fact that the functionality of the standard BTG in defence is 4-7 kilometres. Thus, the forces available are not enough to cover the border with Ukraine, considering the regular infiltration of sabotage groups and armed formations affiliated with the Russian opposition such as the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion.

Regarding Moscow's ally, Minsk, during the winter and spring of 2023, tens of thousands of RAF soldiers underwent training at Belarusian training centres. Later, most of them joined the occupation contingents in Donbas and southern Ukraine. As of today, there is no assembled Russian and Belarusian troop formation deployed along the Ukrainian-Belarusian border that possesses offensive capabilities.

Through the mobilisation measures it took last autumn, Russia successfully bolstered its military units with an increased number of personnel. However, the lack of trained assault infantry and middle-ranking commanders due to large losses caused the inability of the RAF to fulfill the Kremlin's political desire of completely occupying of the "annexed" regions of Ukraine.

Moreover, the level of armoured vehicle saturation within Russian units remains relatively low, directly resulting from the significant loss of over 10,600 units, including more than 2,000 tanks. [\(7\)](#) Russia is trying to increase its military production, but, due to the lack of technological capacities and sanctions, the capabilities of the Russian military-industrial complex are undermined. Therefore, Russia is forced to focus mainly on repairing and using Soviet-era stocks. Consequently, after a year of war, the RAF degraded to the use of second-generation tanks, such as the T-54. [\(8\)](#)

## **Ukraine**

Ukraine carefully conceals data on the number and structure of the units that participate in its 2023 offensive. However, it is possible to make certain estimates regarding the numerical composition of the offensive groupings within the AFU and its technical provision based on public statements and assessments from the higher command. Back in September 2022, Commander-in-Chief of the AFU Valery Zaluzhnyi stated, "Preparation of an offensive campaign demands that Ukraine sets up one or more operational (operational-strategic) groupings of forces consisting of 10 to 20 combined arms

brigades, depending on the intent and ambitions of the Ukrainian Command.” [\(9\)](#) At the end of April 2023, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Kyiv's Western partners “trained and equipped” more than nine new Ukrainian armoured brigades. [\(10\)](#)

Experts cautiously assume that today the AFU have prepared at least 12 brigades with a total number of at least 30,000 servicemen to break through Russian defence. Simultaneously, during winter-spring of 2023, the Offensive Guard formation was established by the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs. As of now, the Offensive Guard includes nine assault brigades. The formation's mobile motorised infantry consists of approximately 20,000-30,000 personnel, and aims to operate in the rear of the enemy and surround his units.

On 25 May 2023, during the opening speech at the 12th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, tUS Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that the member countries have allocated about 65 billion dollars in military aid to Ukraine in order to strengthen the combat capabilities of the AFU. [\(11\)](#) According to Colonel Martin O'Donnell, the spokesperson of the US Army Europe and Africa Command, the international community provided Ukraine with about 600 types of weapons and ammunition. [\(12\)](#) Among other things, Kyiv received M142 HIMARS and M270 missile systems; self-propelled howitzers like CAESAR, PzH2000 and KRAB; self-propelled anti-aircraft guns like Gepard; M777 and FH70 howitzers; and other systems. M1 Abrams tanks, AS90s, Archers, and more are being prepared for shipment soon. [\(13\)](#)

In order to ensure Ukraine's offensive capabilities, the “tank coalition” was established in January 2023. Back then, the Ukrainian Minister of Defence stated, “We need a ‘tank coalition’ with the main tanks of NATO countries for the counteroffensive. We will use them as a ‘steel fist’ in order to break through the defense line...” [\(14\)](#) So far, nine countries have pledged to provide more than 150 Leopard tanks, while 14 Challenger 2 tanks provided by the United Kingdom. [\(15\)](#) In addition, Ukraine has received more than 1,500 units of medium-armoured wheeled and tracked vehicles and around 950 lightly armoured vehicles, mainly on wheeled chassis, from partner countries. In addition, a significant amount of engineering equipment and demining machines was transferred to the AFU.

These figures indicate that NATO countries have provided Ukraine with the required minimum in armoured vehicles. Nevertheless, to the AFU, the matter of acquiring additional armoured vehicles to overcome Russian defences remains an urgent concern. For example, since the beginning of the war, more than 480 units of T-72 tanks of various modifications have been delivered to Ukraine. However, this does not signify a substantial increase in Ukraine's tank fleet as the AFU has lost more than 540 tanks of Soviet origin since 24 February 2022, according to Oryx. [\(16\)](#)

Another factor that complicates Ukraine's offensive is the overwhelming dominance of Russian aviation over the battlefield. The Russian army is actively using aviation to deliver comprehensive fire strikes on Ukrainian forces engaged in offensive operations. Russian helicopters that strike with



guided missiles at a distance of 10-15 kilometres could fall prey to the Soviet Buk and Tor air defence systems (SAM). But, the AFU faces critical shortage of anti-aircraft missiles for Soviet SAMs.

That is why it remains a priority for Ukraine to obtain a significant number of frontal air defence systems and at least 40-50 F-16 squadrons, which would help oust Russian tactical aviation from the battlefield. Additionally, the need to strengthen the capabilities of the Ukrainian Air Force remains essential, not only for offensive operations but also to enhance the country's air defence. Under the scope of "F-16 Coalition", which corresponds to the "tank coalition", the training of Ukrainian pilots has already begun. However, even according to optimistic estimates, Ukraine will be not able to use Western aviation platforms before the end of 2023. Accordingly, the Western aviation component will not become part of the current offensive campaign of the AFU.

Another priority of Ukraine – and the potential Achilles heel of the offensive – is the number of artillery platforms and ammunition. Ukraine received about 800 units of barrel, towed and self-propelled artillery from Western partners. However, the Russian army still maintains superiority over the Ukrainian forces in terms of firepower, with the size of its artillery remaining 2-3 times the size of that of Ukraine. In these conditions, the advantage over the enemy can be ensured only by the accuracy of the artillery systems, which the AFU can achieve through tactical intelligence, counter-battery radars, advanced guidance systems and the use of high-precision ammunition such as Excalibur.

## **The Ukrainian offensive: Goals and challenges**

The preparatory stage of Ukraine's offensive operation started in mid-May. The initial strikes with Storm Shadow cruise missiles on Russian rear bases in the occupied territories can be seen as a tentative beginning. Simultaneously, the AFU attacked Russian command posts and logistics centres in order to disrupt the command and control system of the occupation contingent.

Ukraine took advantage of the configuration of the front line, which resembles a semicircle. The AFU operates on the inner side of the contact line, resulting in a shorter manoeuvring distance compared to that of the Russians. Such configuration allows the Ukrainian command to manoeuvre and create threats of a breakthrough in various parts of the frontline, while Russia needs much more time to transfer its reserves. Therefore, the intention of the Ukrainian command is to stretch the arc of the front. The implementation of this plan is attributed to the actions of the sabotage groups and armed units affiliated with the Russian opposition within the border regions of Bryansk and Belgorod.

Without a doubt, the Russian command is aware of the dilemma of stretched communications and the corresponding threats associated with the lack of sufficient reserves in the most dangerous areas. This was probably the main motive for the Russians to blow up the Kakhovka Dam. [\(17\)](#) Through the dam's collapse, the Russian command intended to eliminate the threat of Ukrainian forces landing over the river and thus reduce the length of the front by 296 kilometres. Hence, the destruction of the

Kakhovka Dam aimed to disrupt the entire complex of the Ukrainian offensive by creating a large-scale humanitarian disaster and threaten Kyiv's Western partners with the possibility of a nuclear accident at the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Moreover, the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam will significantly influence the strategic planning of military operations for both parties. Undoubtedly, the disaster made the task of the AFU more challenging, since the Russians redeployed some of the units that held the front along the Dnieper to other directions. However, this cannot significantly affect the result of Ukraine's offensive, because after the water level in the Dnieper drops, the threat of sabotage actions and landing operations by the Special Operations Forces of Ukraine will continue.

The intensification of hostilities in the Zaporizhzhia region, which is actively being covered by global media, has captured the attention of the masses. This is primarily due to the deployment of Western-manufactured armoured vehicles, including Leopard 2 tanks and M2 Bradley, in the battlefield for the first time.

It should be noted that the assault of Ukrainian units in the southern frontline is carried out at a limited tactical level. Currently, the primary objective of the AFU is to establish fire engagement with Russia in different sections of the front with a total length of 150 kilometres. This strategy aims to confuse the Russian command, leaving it uncertain about the exact location of the AFU armoured brigade's decisive blow. It is worth noting that the Ukrainian army commits its forces to combat at the company-platoon level, while keeping the main reserves in the rear. In contrast, during the initial phase of the Ukrainian offensive, the Russian command was compelled to engage the reserves of the second echelon of defence, leaving them vulnerable to artillery attacks.

Given that the Russians are heavily dependent on artillery for their defence, one of the main criteria for the success of the Ukrainian offensive is the effectiveness of counter-battery combat. According to the official statistics of the Ukrainian General Staff, Russia lost about 373 artillery systems in the first 17 days of June 2023, and 553 artillery systems in May, a record since the beginning of the war. [\(18\)](#) These data indicate the growing superiority of the AFU in artillery duels.

However, as of now, the Russians have a very significant advantage in the number of both artillery systems and ammunition. Therefore, the purpose of the AFU's current actions is to identify the location of Russian artillery and destroy it. The effectiveness of this process will be crucial for the progress of the Ukrainian offensive, as it is essential to neutralise Russia's firepower in order to avoid excessive losses while attempting to breach the fortified positions.

That is why the dynamics of the Ukrainian offensive are not rapid. The AFU experienced a quick operational breakthrough during the Kharkiv operation in the autumn of 2022. Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to anticipate a repetition of this scenario, as the current configuration in the south of



Ukraine resembles conditions during the liberation of the right bank of the Kherson region last fall, primarily due to Russia's well-prepared defence system. The active phase of the de-occupation of Kherson lasted about two months, before Russian defence was exhausted and the occupiers were forced to retreat to the left bank of the Dnieper. The preparatory stage of the Ukraine's offensive will probably be characterised by contact battles at tactical depth and active counter-battery combat. The corresponding operations can last weeks or even months. The breakthrough of the main line of defence by AFU armoured battalions and the entry of mobile units from the Offensive Guard into the operational space will only occur after the depletion of Russian operational reserves.

In sum, the main task of the AFU offensive is to reach the administrative border of the occupied Crimean Peninsula or Azov Sea. Such a scenario would mean the final collapse of the southern grouping of the RAF. At the same time, there is a possibility of change in the main attack direction by the Ukrainian General Staff. In the event of less favourable development for Ukraine, its offensive could potentially transform into a protracted confrontation lasting several months, leading to exhaustion on both sides. Under such circumstances, territorial gains made by Ukraine would likely hold only tactical significance. As a result, by the autumn of 2023, both sides will likely find themselves too exhausted to continue with assault operations, leading to a new phase of accumulating reserves and regrouping forces.

Regarding the potential for the Russian occupation contingent to impede Ukraine's offensive, it can be assumed that the Russian command bets on preserving pre-established and fortified positions and defensive lines, employing a combination of heavy artillery fire. Russia also relies on air support for its troops. At the airfields of the Southern Operational Zone (Crimea, Rostov Oblast, Krasnodar Krai), the Russian command concentrated almost half of all operational-tactical aviation. That is why the speed of the advance of Ukrainian troops in the south, where the flat steppe landscape prevails, depends on the saturation of the battle formations with the army's air defence systems.

On the ground, the Russians may try to distract the AFU with active actions in other areas of the front, forcing the Ukrainian command to withdraw strategic reserves from the south and thus weaken Ukrainian offensive units in key areas.

## **The Wagner mutiny and its influence on the course of the war**

The mutiny of the Wagner Private Military Company on 23 June 2023 had no impact on the battlefield. As of the beginning of summer, the Wagner group's units were withdrawn to rear camps and training centres for replenishment following months of exhausting battle for Bakhmut. Therefore, the raid of the Wagnerites on Moscow did not lead to the exposure of any sections of the Russian front. The mutiny of the mercenaries could have potentially affected the combat capabilities of the occupying forces in Ukraine only in the case of a protracted internal Russian crisis in which neither side had a

decisive advantage. In such a case, there would be a high probability that some regular units of the Russian army, particularly those to which convicts were recruited, would align themselves with Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner group. Then, the Kremlin would have been compelled to withdraw its most capable and loyal units to the rear in order to neutralise the rebellious mercenaries. Consequently, a serious risk of front collapse and the Russian army's withdrawal from some of the occupied Ukrainian territories would emerge.

However, Prigozhin and the Kremlin reached the backroom deal before the Wagner group's armed columns reached the outskirts of Moscow. According to the information available, the Wagner PMC will be redeployed to Belarus, and almost all of the heavy armoured vehicles that were at its disposal will be returned to the Russian army. The Wagnerites who remain within Russia's territory are expected to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defence and be distributed among various units of the Russian army or "regular" private military companies. (Currently, several dozen military campaigns are operating in Russia under the patronage of the Russian Ministry of Defence and state-owned corporations, like Gazprom.) Thus, the Wagner group will most likely not be involved in hostilities on the territory of Ukraine any longer. However, considering that it received financial support from the federal budget, [\(19\)](#) and the Russian army provided it with equipment, munition and armoured vehicles, the "deactivation" of Prigozhin and his mercenaries will not have a significant impact on the fighting capacity of the occupying contingent.

Regarding the alarmist assumptions in the Western media, it is worth stating that the Wagner group's structures in Belarus do not pose a significant threat to Ukraine from the northern direction. This private military group has specialised in urban assaults since the campaign in Syria. Moreover, the capture of Bakhmut was accomplished through the extensive utilisation of manpower, which was replenished with prisoners. However, following the failure of the mutiny, Wagner has lost access to the resources provided by the Russian state. This will significantly diminish their capacity to engage in large-scale military operations. Therefore, the use of Wagnerites in attempts for the breakthrough of the fortified forested northern border of Ukraine would be utterly futile. Therefore, it is highly likely that in the near future, Wagner staff will be reduced to several thousand mercenaries and will return to covert force operations and illegal trade in other regions of the world.

At the same time, the analysis of the response of the Kremlin to the attempted mutiny reveals several trends indicating erosion of the Russian state, namely:

- The Russian leadership does not control the power structures, especially in critical conditions, which is an indicator of the Kremlin's low resistance to the threat of new coups.
- The Russian president suffered irreparable reputational losses by opting for agreements with the rebels that were deemed ambiguous in terms of the state's prestige, instead of adopting a tough resistance. Currently, the Russian leader found himself in a zugzwang. On one hand,

amnesty to the Wagnerites despite the losses suffered by the Russian army in the skirmishes with the group will cause dissatisfaction among the military and will remain an unequivocal testimony of Putin's weakness. On the other hand, repression against the Wagnerites will cause a split in society and trigger the mobilisation of the radical right-wing opposition on an anti-Kremlin positions.

- The reaction of Russian society proved indifference to the fate of the national leader, which destroyed the myth of Putin's unconditional support. The most radical Russians, upon whom Putin relied during the war, openly demonstrated their support for Prigozhin's actions. For the Kremlin, this creates domestic political risks in the upcoming presidential elections in the spring of 2024.

Accordingly, in the near future, it will be increasingly challenging for Russia to maintain control over Ukrainian territories not only because of combat pressure on the front, but also because of internal conflict. In addition, countries that remains neutral or loyal to the Kremlin will revise their assessment of the stability of the current regime in Russia, which will affect the level of military-technical cooperation with Moscow.

## Conclusion

Ukraine is consistently preparing favourable operational conditions to ensure the success of the offensive. Under current conditions, mitigating risks for Ukraine is closely linked to enhancing the capabilities of the AFU's anti-missile defence system and military aviation. Another challenge for Ukraine's offensive is related with imbalance between Ukraine and Russia in the number of artillery systems and ammunition, as well as the dominance of the Russian military aviation over the battlefield. However, despite the lack of certain types of modern weapons, the operational art of the Ukrainian command will be decisive for the outcome of the offensive. The campaign of 2023 will be a historical test for the Ukrainian army not only because of its crucial importance for the overall course of the war, but also due to Ukraine's lack of experience in conducting large-scale military operations that involve overcoming Russia's well-prepared echelon defence.

For the Kremlin, the success of the Ukrainian army and the loss of significant territories would pose a threat to the legitimacy of the Russian leader. Therefore, the war will continue for some time until, under the threat of a complete military defeat, Russian elites will not force the Kremlin to withdraw from the territory of Ukraine. On the other hand, in the case of the stagnation of the Ukrainian offensive, Moscow will try to fix its existing territorial gains. In order to achieve its goals, Russia will use the entire arsenal of diplomatic pressure and nuclear blackmail in order to force the West and Ukraine to negotiate a ceasefire that will only be a prelude to a new war.

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**\*Volodymyr Solovian** is a writer and researcher specialising in information security, national resilience and security sector reforms in Ukraine.

**\* Mykhailo Samus** is an experienced researcher in the sphere of international relations, national resilience and new generation warfare and the director of the New Geopolitics Research Network.

## References

1. These numbers are based on daily reports of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.
2. The main types of missiles are Kalibr, X-101 and X-555. The data given does not take into account the S-300 air defence system with a range of 75-100 kilometres, which Russia has adapted for hitting ground targets. Ammunition for the S-300 is estimated at several thousand anti-aircraft missiles, while Russia's ability to produce cruise missiles is limited to 60-80 units per month.
3. During May 2023 alone, Russia launched over 300 Iranian Shahed against Ukraine.
4. “В марте многоцелевые истребители Су-35 Flanker-E, построенные для Египта, отправятся в Иран [Su-35 Flanker-E multi-role fighters built for Egypt will go to Iran in March]”, *Overclockers*, 16 January 2023, <https://t.ly/gBaX> (accessed 20 June 2023).
5. Igor Fedyk, “Russian-Ukrainian war: Ukrainian ‘Verdun’ and the new commander of Putin’s ‘SMO’”, *The New Geopolitics Research Network*, <https://t.ly/ce1b> (accessed 19 June 2023).
6. A battalian tactical group (BTG) can be defined as a task-organised, combined arms and tactical formation created by a brigade or regiment commander to complete a specific, discrete mission. Standard BTG equipment consists of 11 tanks, 33 armoured combat vehicles, 12 self-propelled howitzers, 12 multiple launch rocket systems, 3 air defence systems and 3 electronic warfare systems. Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, “Getting to Know the Russian Battalion Tactical Group”, *The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, 14 April 2022, <https://t.ly/3ozG> (accessed 18 June 2023).
7. Stijn Mitzer et al., “Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses During The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine”, *Oryx*, <https://t.ly/KPdSp> (accessed 20 June 2023).
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9. “Prospects for running a military campaign in 2023: Ukraine’s perspective”, *UKRINFORM*, 7 September 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/25zjhatu> (accessed 20 June 2023).
10. “Stoltenberg: Ukraine receives 1,550 armoured vehicles, 230 tanks and large amount of ammunition”, *European Pravda*, 27 April 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/5945d66f> (accessed 20 June 2023).
11. Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the 12th Ukraine Defense Contact Group (As Delivered), *U.S. Department of Defense*, 25 May 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4r2z5anw> (accessed 20 June 2023).

12. Milan Lelic, "F-16 очень дорогие, а Украине сейчас нужны снаряды и ПВО. Интервью с американскими военными" [F-16s are very expensive, and Ukraine now needs shells and air defence: Interview with US military]", *RBC*, 11 May 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2mtz28t5> (accessed 19 June 2023).
13. Olexandra Zakharova and Nataliya Tolub, "Hundreds of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles and thousands of missiles: What weapons the West gave to Ukraine", *The Page*, 23 May 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3m8udch6> (accessed 20 June 2023).
14. "Резніков: «Танкова коаліція» нам потрібна для контрнаступу» [Reznikov: We need a "tank coalition" for a counteroffensive]", *UKRINFORM*, 3 February 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxmw84h> (accessed 20 June 2023).
15. "Nine Countries Promised More than 150 Leopard Tanks to Ukraine — Austin", *European Pravda*, 15 March 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/y4cdjec4> (accessed 20 June 2023).
16. Stijn Mitzer et al., "Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses During The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine", *Oryx*, <https://t.ly/KPdSp> (accessed 20 June 2023).
17. James Glanz et al., "Why the Evidence Suggests Russia Blew Up the Kakhovka Dam", *The New York Times*, 16 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfwr6d4> (accessed 18 June 2023).
18. Aleksey Korytko, "Україна готується до прориву. Чому зараз важливі не новини з фронту, а цифри російських втрат [Ukraine is preparing for a breakthrough. Right now, the numbers of Russian casualties are more important than news from the front]", *Focus*, 20 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2cvempaf> (accessed 20 June 2023).
19. According to official data, the Wagner group received roughly \$1 billion in funding over the past year.